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A D D R E S S
AT THE
UNVEILING OF THE STATUE
OF
COLONEL PRESCOTT,

BUNKER HILL, JUNE 17, 1881

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BY
ROBERT C. WINTHROP.



ADDRESS

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OF

COLONEL WILLIAM PRESCOTT,

ON BUNKER HILL,

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CAMBRIDGE:

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A D D R E S S.

FELLOW-CITIZENS: —

I CANNOT assume the position which belongs to me to-day, as President of the Bunker Hill Monument Association, and enter on the discharge of the duties which devolve upon me in that capacity, without first giving expression to my deep sense of the honor of an office, which has been held heretofore by so many distinguished men.

Fifty-eight years have now elapsed since this Association received its Charter of Incorporation from the Legislature of Massachusetts. During that period its Presidency has been held, successively, by the gallant Revolutionary patriot, John Brooks; by the illustrious defender of the Constitution of the United States, Daniel Webster; by the grand old Boston merchant and philanthropist, Thomas Handasyd Perkins; by that sterling statesman and admirable Governor, Levi Lincoln; by that eminent and learned jurist and Judge, William Prescott; by the amiable physician, Dr. Abner Phelps; by the accomplished and independent editor, Joseph T.

Buckingham; by the worthy and faithful historian of the Association, George Washington Warren; and, lastly, by the devoted and excellent Historian of the battle itself, and of everything relating to that battle, — including “The Siege of Boston,” “The Life of Warren,” and “The Rise of the Republic,” — our lamented friend, whose name I cannot pronounce without a fresh sense of his loss to us and to the history of his country, — Richard Frothingham.

If, my friends, at the termination of the brief service on which I can look back, and the certainly not longer service to which I may look forward, my own name shall not be thought unworthy of such associations, I shall count it to have been among the crowning distinctions of a life now drawing to its close.

One, only, of my predecessors is left among the living, — Mr. Warren, — whose term of service, as I may not forget, equals those of all the others put together, and whose presence is thus welcomed with peculiar interest on this occasion.

One, only, of those predecessors was present, as a witness and as an actor, at the conflict which our monument commemorates, — JOHN BROOKS, of Medford, — remembered well by some of us as a model governor of Massachusetts, but in 1775 a young Major in Colonel Frye’s regiment; who aided the heroic Prescott in the construction of the redoubt; who was his chosen companion in that midnight stroll upon the shore, to make sure that the British sentinels had taken no alarm and were still crying “All’s well;” and who only left this hill, at last, to bear a message, on foot, from Prescott to General Ward at Cambridge, — across that Neck

of fire, on which the veteran Pomeroy, while willingly exposing his own life, would not risk the life of a borrowed horse, amid the ceaseless storm of shot and shell which was sweeping over it from floating batteries and from fixed batteries, from the Lively and the Falcon and the Glasgow and the Somerset and the Cerberus;—a message, not asking to be relieved by other troops, for Prescott scorned the idea that the men who had raised the works had not the best right, and were not the best able, to defend them, but a message imploring those reinforcements and supplies, of men, of ammunition, and of food, which had been promised the night before, but most of which never came, or came too late. That was the perilous service performed by our first presiding officer. That was the ordeal to which he was subjected. I may well congratulate myself that no such crucial test of courage has been transmitted as an heirloom of this Chair, or is prescribed as an indispensable qualification of those who occupy it.

For those who have succeeded Governor Brooks, it has been privilege and pride enough to assist in the erection and preservation of this noble shaft; in commemorating from year to year the patriotism and heroism of the men who fought this first great battle of the American Revolution; and in illustrating the principles and motives which inspired and actuated them. This duty—I need hardly say—has been discharged faithfully and fully in the past, and but little remains to be done by any one hereafter. The inspiration and influence which have already proceeded from these silent blocks of granite, since they were first hewn out

from yonder Quincy quarries,— as they were slowly piled up through a period of eighteen years, to the height of two hundred and twenty-one feet, and as they have since stood in their majestic unity and grandeur,— can never be over-estimated. The words which have been uttered at its base and around it, from the first magnificent address of Daniel Webster, the orator alike of the corner-stone and of the capstone, down to the present hour, have been second to no other inspiration or influence, since those of the battle itself, in animating and impelling the sons to emulate the glory of their fathers, and to be ever ready and ever resolved to jeopard their lives, on the high places of the field, in defence of Union and Liberty.

For indeed, my friends, this stately obelisk is no mere mute memorial of the past, but a living, speaking pledge for the future, that those free institutions for which the first great struggle was made here, at the very point of the bayonet, shall here and always find glad and gallant defenders, whenever and wherever those institutions shall be assailed. It is not a structure— thanks to those who designed and built it— capable of being desecrated or perverted— as, alas! the Old South has been, and the Old State House still is— to purposes of gain or traffic. It occupies ground on which no speculation would ever dare to encroach, or even to cast a rapacious or a covetous eye. Its simple, massive masonry may defy any less unimaginable convulsion than such as has recently overwhelmed the poor island of Chios. Not a Monolith; not of any mythological or mythical origin; there will be no temptation for archaeologists to dislocate it from its rightful surround-

ings, and bear it away to strange and uncongenial climes. Here, on the very spot where Prescott fought and Warren fell, it will stand and tell its wondrous story of the birth of American Liberty, in plain, distinct, unmistakable characters, to the thousands and tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands who shall visit it or gaze upon it, for as many centuries as the equivocal hieroglyphics of the obelisk of Alexandria, now so marvellously translated to the Central Park at New York, have told the story of Egyptian despots or dynasties.

How different a story! What gratitude to God and man should swell our hearts at this hour, as such a contrast is even suggested,—as we turn from the contemplation of Pharaohs and Ptolemies to that of our august and only Washington, and from the darkness of Paganism to the glorious light of Christianity! Formal Doxologies may disappear from Revised New Testaments,—as they ought to disappear if not found in the original text of the Sacred Volume,—but they will never fail to be breathed up to the skies from millions of pious and patriotic hearts, from generation to generation, for the blessings of civil and religious Freedom, until those blessings shall cease to be enjoyed and appreciated!

And now, fellow-citizens, in hailing the return of a day, which can hardly be counted of inferior interest or importance to any day in the whole illuminated calendar of the American Revolution, and in welcoming you all, as it is my official province to do, to its renewed observance on these consecrated Heights, I have no purpose

of entering upon any detailed historical discourse. The 17th of June, 1775, as its successive anniversaries come round, from year to year, will never be overlooked, nor ever fail to awaken fresh emotions of gratitude and joy in every American breast. But the more formal and stately commemorations of the day may well succeed each other at considerable intervals. Our magnificent Centennial celebration, with all its brilliant incidents and utterances, is still too fresh in our remembrance, and in the remembrance of the whole country, to bear any early repetition. Nor would we forget, if we could forget, that other Centennial celebrations are now rightfully in order.

The year '75 belonged peculiarly to Massachusetts, — to Lexington, and Concord, and Bunker Hill. The whole nation recognized our claim. From the East and the West, from the North and the South, alike, — to yonder plains of the first blood, and to this hill of the first battle, — the people were seen flocking in numbers which could not be counted. Citizens and soldiers of almost every variety of military or civil association; representative organizations and representative men; mayors of cities, governors of States, senators and cabinet officers, the President of the United States to one of them, and the Vice-President to both, came gladly, at the call of Massachusetts, to unite with her in her sumptuous and splendid ceremonials. Six years only have since elapsed, during which we have rejoiced to see other States, and other cities and towns, in New York and New Jersey, in Vermont and Pennsylvania, in North Carolina and South Carolina, and I know not where besides, holding high holidays on the hun-

dredth anniversaries of events which have illustrated their own annals.

Another great year of our Lord and of Liberty has at length arrived, and is already far advanced; and the attention of the whole country is now justly turned to that momentous Southern campaign of 1781, which began with the great battle of the Cowpens,—just celebrated so worthily,—and which ended with the surrender of the British Army to the allied forces of America and France at Yorktown. I need not say that all our hearts ought to be, and are, with our brethren of the South, as they are so eagerly preparing to celebrate the great events which occurred on their own soil. We should shrink from anything which might even seem like competition, by renewing a general and costly celebration here. Rather let our sympathies be freely offered, and our contributions be liberally remitted, to them; and let us show how heartily we unite with them in their just pride and exultation, that the soil of the Old Dominion was privileged to be the scene of the crowning victory of American Independence. And may the blended associations and memories of Yorktown and Bunker Hill supply the reciprocal warp and woof, for weaving afresh any ties of mutual respect and mutual affection which may have been unstrung or loosened by the storm of civil war, and which may still remain snarled and tangled, and for renewing those chords of brotherhood, and those bonds of Union, which shall be as imperishable as the glories of our common Fathers!

I have said, fellow-citizens, that I did not come here to-day to deliver any elaborate or exhaustive historical

discourse. Indeed, where could I turn, — even if it were expected or desired by any one that I should describe in detail the struggle which has made this hill so historic and so hallowed, — where could I turn for any materials which have not already become hackneyed and threadbare, and which are not as familiar as household words to those who surround me? No battle of its size, or of any size, the world over, from Marathon to Waterloo, or earlier or later, on either side of the ocean, has been more thoroughly investigated, and more minutely depicted, than that which took place here one hundred and six years ago to-day. Of all its antecedents and inducing causes, — the Stamp Act, the Writs of Assistance, the British Regiments, the Boston Massacre, the Tea Tax, the Tea Party, the Boston Port Bill, Lexington, Concord, — of which one of them all, has a single fact, a single tradition, a single illustration, eluded the research of our historians and antiquarians, our orators and poets? And as to the conflict itself, — to which they all pointed and led, like so many guide-posts or railway tracks to a common and predestined terminus, — what could be added to the brilliant chapters of Bancroft, the thrilling sketch of Washington Irving, the careful illustrations of Lossing, the elaborate and faithful narrative of Frothingham, and the earlier and most valuable history of Dr. George E. Ellis, who made even Frothingham his debtor? Meantime, as I am but too conscious, the rhetoric, as well as the record, has been drawn upon to the last dreg. Not only have Webster and Everett, again and again, condensed and crystallized all the great scenes and incidents and emotions of the day in those consummate phrases and periods

of theirs, which defy all rivalry, and supply the most inspiring and wholesome declamation for all our schools, — but the whole story was told again, with signal felicity and skill, in all the fulness of its impressive details, by the Orator of the Centennial, General Devens, whose presence is always so welcome in his native Charlestown.

No one, I think, with such histories and field-books and hand-books at command, and who has not wholly neglected such sources of information, can come up to these consecrated heights, to this *Mons Sacer* of New England, on this day or on any day, without finding the whole scene unrolling itself before his eye like some grand stereoscopic panorama. He recalls the sudden gathering of the three selected Massachusetts regiments, — with the little Connecticut fatigue party under the intrepid Knowlton, — in front of General Ward's headquarters at Cambridge, on the evening of the 16th of June. He sees Prescott taking command, agreeably to the order of the Commander-in-chief. He hears, as through a telephone, the solemn and fervent prayer of President Langdon, before they moved from the Common. He takes up the silent march with them, just as the clock strikes nine, and follows close by the side of those two sergeants, bearing dark lanterns, behind Prescott leading the way. He halts with them after crossing to this peninsula, as they approach the scene of their destination, and shares their perplexing uncertainties as to the true place for their proposed intrenchments. He is here with them at last, on this very spot, with nothing brighter than starlight, thank Heaven, when they first arrived, to betray them to the British in Boston, and

with only a little “remnant of a waning moon” afterwards. He hears and sees the first spades and pickaxes struck into the now sacred sod just as the Boston clocks strike twelve,—giving their ominous warning that the night is far spent, that the day is at hand, that four hours at most remain before the darkness shall be gone, when they and their works must be exposed to the view and the assault of the enemy. But he sees a thousand strong arms, every one with a patriot’s will behind it, steadily and vigorously improving every instant of those hours; and the dawning of that bright midsummer St. Botolph’s day finds him standing with Prescott, within an almost finished redoubt of six or seven feet in height, inclosing a space of eight rods square, and swarming with the sons of Liberty.

But, alas, the panorama is but half unrolled. Crimson folds, not altogether the reflections of a blazing, fiery sunshine, begin to show themselves, as the vision of our imaginary visitor proceeds. He witnesses the amazement and consternation of the British sentinels on ship and shore, as they rouse themselves and rub their eyes to descry the rebel intrenchments which have sprung up like a prodigy. He hears the angry and furious cannonade which bursts forth at once from the dogs of war anchored in the stream. He walks the parapet with Prescott, to give confidence and courage to his soldiers, as they see one of their number, for the first time, shot down and dying at their side. He perceives the hurried preparations in Boston; he sees the dragoons galloping with orders from the Province House to the camp on the Common; he hears the rattle of the artillery wagons along the pavements. The big

barques for transportation come at length in sight, with the glittering brass six-pounders in their bows, and crowded from stem to stern with grenadiers and light infantry and marines in their gay scarlet uniforms. He sees them landing at yonder Morton's Point, and coolly refreshing themselves on the grass for an encounter with our half-starved and almost wholly exhausted raw militia. The first onset, with its grand and triumphant repulse; the second onset, while Charlestown is now blazing, and amid every circumstance and complication of horror, but with its even grander and still more triumphant repulse.—these pass rapidly before his exulting eye. An interval now occurs. “Will they come on again?” is heard on the American side. “It would be downright butchery for us,” is heard from some of the British soldiers on the other side. And, certainly, the pluck of old Mother England was never more signally displayed on our soil, or on any other soil beneath the sun, than when General Sir William Howe, as brave in the field as he was sometimes irresolute and unskilful in strategy, with Brigadier Pigot as his lieutenant, and with Sir Henry Clinton as a volunteer, led up what remained of grenadiers and light infantry — their knapsacks stripped from their backs, and relying wholly on their bayonets — to that third terrific onslaught, which comes at last to sear the very eyeballs of any actual, or even imaginary, beholder. But there was pluck at the top of the hill as well as at the bottom, or on the way up, — bone of the same bone, flesh of the same flesh, blood of the same blood, — the valor of Old England, inflamed and electrified by the spirit of Liberty, in the heart, mind, and muscle of New England.

Prescott with his little band is seen standing undaunted at bay; displaying still and ever,—as Ebenezer Bancroft, of Tyngsborough, a captain in Bridge's regiment, who fought bravely and was wounded at his side, bore special witness that he had displayed through the hottest of the fight,—a coolness and self-possession that would do honor to the greatest hero of any age. But, alas, their ammunition is exhausted, and the British have overheard that it is. The very last artillery cartridge has already been broken up and distributed to the sharpshooters, and there are but fifty bayonets for the whole remaining band,—hardly a hundred and fifty of them left. The grenadiers and marines are already seen scaling the ramparts. The brave but rash Major Pitcairn, who had given the first fatal order to fire at Lexington, and who was now the first to enter here, falls mortally wounded. But hundreds of his men are close behind him, and bayonets and clubbed muskets are now making a chaotic scene of carnage and havoc which beggars all imagination. The redoubt can no longer be held against such desperate odds, and the voice of its wise, as well as fearless, commander is at length heard, giving the word to retire.

The battle, indeed, still rages at earthworks and at rail-fences,—almost a separate engagement,—where Stark and Pomeroy and Knowlton have been doing such gallant service from the beginning; and where Putnam, who had advised and accompanied the original movement, and had displayed every attribute of his heroic nature in promoting its successful prosecution, in almost every stage of its progress, is seen still striving to make a last stand on the neighboring hill-top, and to cover

the retreat of his brave comrades from the redoubt. But all this is auxiliary and incidental, as it all is vain. It is one and the same battle, in its inception and in its close. The day is decided; the conflict ended; and Prescott, among the very last to quit the intrenchments, having resolved never to be taken alive, and parrying the thrusts of British bayonets by dint of his trusty blade, comes out, with garments scorched and pierced, but himself providentially unscathed; and he may now be seen, on the final fold of our imaginary panorama, at the head-quarters of General Ward, at Cambridge,—from which he started the evening before,—to report that he had executed his orders, had made the best fight in his power, and had yielded at last only to superior force.

Such, fellow-citizens and friends, are the faint outlines of a picture which passes rapidly along before any tolerably instructed eye, as it looks out on these surroundings,—impressing itself on retina and lens as vividly and distinctly as Boston's Centennial pageant last autumn, or Harvard's Greek Play last month, was impressed on every eye which witnessed either of them. Such a picture is enough for this occasion. These Charlestown Heights, of which it might almost have been said, as Virgil said of the afterwards famous Alban Mount,—

“ *Tum neque nomen erat, nec honos, aut gloria Monti,*” —

which then had neither glory nor honor, nor even distinct and well-defined names,—Bunker Hill and its dependent slope, Breed,—were lost to us on that day.

The consequences of the battle, and even the confused details of it, developed themselves slowly. It took time for an immediate defeat to put on the aspect and wear the glories of a triumph. I doubt not that some of the old Mandamus Councillors in Boston went to their beds that night, thinking what a fine conspicuous site this would be, for setting up a monument of solemn warning, for all time to come, of the disasters which were sure to fall on the heads of Rebels against British rule! Even by our own New England patriots the result, we are told, was regarded at first not without disappointment and even indignation; and some of the contemporary American accounts, private and official, are said to have been rather in the tone of apology, or even of censure, than of exultation. Nobody for years, adds Frothingham, came forward to claim the honor of having directed this battle.

No wonder that a cloud of uncertainty so long rested on the exact course and conduct of this eventful action. Every one was wholly occupied in making history: there was no leisure for writing history. It was a sudden movement. It was a secret movement. It was designed only to get the start of the British by an advance of our line of intrenchments. No one imagined that it would involve a battle, and no adequate provision was made for such an unexpected contingency. The very order for its execution,—the order of Ward to Prescott,—the only order from any one, or to any one, relating to it, was, without doubt, designedly withheld from the order-book of the Commander-in-chief at Cambridge. It certainly has never been found.

Meantime, one incident of the conflict had over-

whelmed the whole people with grief. The death of Warren, the President of the Provincial Congress, the Chairman of the Committee of Safety, the only chief executive magistrate which Massachusetts then had, and who, only three days before, had been chosen one of the major-generals of her forces,—in the bloom of his manhood, “the expectancy and rose of the fair State,” beloved and trusted by all,—could not, and did not, fail to create a sorrow and a shock which absorbed all hearts. The fall of glorious John Hampden at Chalgrove Field is the only parallel in history to that of Joseph Warren at Bunker Hill. That thrilling lament,—almost recalling the wail of David over Absalom,—to which Webster gave utterance here in 1825, making the whole air around him vibrate and tremble to the pathos of his transcendent tones, and leaving hardly an unmoved heart or an unmoistened eye in his whole vast audience,—was but a faint echo of the deep distress into which that event had plunged all New England fifty years before. But though one of Warren’s proudest distinctions will ever be, that he came to this hill as a Volunteer, before he had received any military commission, and that he nobly declined to assume any authority,—when Putnam proposed to take his orders at the rail-fence, and again when Prescott offered him the command at the redoubt,—his name was long associated, both at home and abroad, with the chief leadership of an action to which he had come with a musket on his shoulder,—though he may have exchanged it for a sword before he fell.

Everything, indeed, was in doubt and confusion at that moment. Even Warren’s death was not known

for a certainty at Cambridge for several days after it occurred, and as late as the 19th the vote of the Provincial Congress, providing for the choice of his successor, spoke of him as of one “supposed to be killed.” All our military affairs were in a state of transition, reorganization, and complete change. The war was to be no longer a local or provincial war. The Continental Congress at Philadelphia had already adopted it as a war of the United Colonies; and, on the very day on which Warren fell, they had drawn up and ratified a commission, as General and Commander-in-chief of all such forces as are, or shall be, raised for the maintenance and preservation of American Liberty, for GEORGE WASHINGTON, of Virginia. Congress had heard nothing about Bunker Hill, when this Providential appointment was made. Lexington and Concord, of which the tidings had reached them some weeks before, had been enough to ripen their counsels and settle their policy. And now the public mind in this quarter was too much engrossed with the advent of Washington to Cambridge, and the great results which were to be expected, to busy itself much with the details of what was considered a mere foregone defeat.

It was only when Washington himself, hearing at New York or Trenton, on his way to Cambridge, of what had occurred here, had expressed his renewed and confirmed conviction that the liberties of America were now safe; it was only when Franklin, hearing of it in France, wrote to his friends in London, “Americans will fight; England has lost her colonies forever;” it was only when Gage had written to Lord Dartmouth that “the rebels are not the despicable rabble too many

have supposed them to be. . . The number of killed and wounded is greater than our forces can afford to lose. . . The conquest of this country is not easy. . . I think it my duty to let your Lordship know the true situation of affairs ;” it was, certainly, only when from all the American Colonies there had come voices of congratulation and good cheer, recognizing the momentous character of the battle, the bravery with which it had been fought, and the conclusive evidence it had afforded that the undisciplined yeomanry of the country were not afraid to confront the veteran armies of Old England at the point of the bayonet in defence of their rights and liberties ;— it was only then, that its true importance began to be attached to the battle of Bunker Hill, as the first regular battle of the American Revolution, and the most eventful in its consequences, — especially in those far-reaching moral influences which were to be felt, and which were felt, to the very end of the war.

A much longer time was to elapse before the record of that day was to be summed up, as it has recently been, by the latest and highest authority on “ the Battles of the Revolution,” as “ the record of a battle which in less than two hours destroyed a town, laid fifteen hundred men upon the battle-field, equalized the relations of veterans and militia, aroused three millions of people to a definite struggle for National Independence, and fairly inaugurated the war for its accomplishment.”¹

Let me not omit, however, to add, that no more

¹ “ Battles of the American Revolution.” By Colonel Henry B. Carrington, U. S. A.

impressive, or more generous, or more just and welcome tribute has ever been paid to the men and the deeds we are commemorating to-day, than that which may be found in the "Memoirs of the Southern Campaign of the Revolution," where an incidental allusion to Bunker Hill concludes with these emphatic words: "The military annals of the world rarely furnish an achievement which equals the firmness and courage displayed on that proud day by the gallant band of Americans; and it certainly stands first in the brilliant events of our war. When future generations shall inquire where are the men who gained the highest prize of glory in the arduous contest which ushered in our nation's birth, upon PRESCOTT and his companions in arms will the eye of history beam."

These are the words written and published seventy years ago by Henry Lee, of Virginia, the gallant commander of the famous Cavalry Legion, known familiarly as "Light Horse Harry," and the father of one, whose purity of character and brilliancy of accomplishments compelled each one of us who knew him to exclaim, as the late war for the Union went on, "Talis quum sis, utinam noster esses!" Would we could call so grand a leader ours!

Frothingham has told us truly, that no one, for years, came forward to claim the honor of having directed this battle. And there was at least one man,—of whom Everett well said, "The modesty of this sterling patriot was equal to his heroism,"—who never, to the end of his life, made any boastful claim for himself; who was contented with stating the facts of that eventful day in reply to the inquiries of John Adams, and in

repeated conversations with his own son, and who then awaited the judgment of history,—letting all considerations of personal fame and personal glory go, in the proud consciousness of having done his duty.

And now, fellow-citizens, we are gathered here to-day to pay a long-postponed debt, to fulfil a long-neglected obligation. We have come to sanction and ratify the award of history, as we find it in the pages of Ellis and Irving and Frothingham and Bancroft, to mention no others, by accepting this splendid gift from a goodly company of our fellow-citizens, of whose names Dr. Ellis, I believe,—to whose inspiration we primarily owe it,—is the sole depositary; and by placing the statue of Colonel William Prescott in the very front of our noble monument,—thus recognizing him in his true relation to the grand action which it commemorates, and of which he was nothing less than the commander. We do so in full remembrance of those memorable words of Webster, which have almost the solemnity and the weight of a judicial decision: “In truth, if there was any commander-in-chief in the field, it was Prescott. From the first breaking of the ground to the retreat, he acted the most important part; and if it were proper to give the battle a name, from any distinguished agent in it, it should be called Prescott’s Battle.”

Our celebration to-day has this sole and simple end; and it becomes me therefore, my friends, to devote the little remnant of my address to a brief notice of the career and character of the man we are assembled to honor.

Descended from a good Puritan stock which had emigrated from Lancashire in Old England, and established a home in New England, as early as 1640, he was born

in Groton, in the good old county of Middlesex, on the 20th of February, 1726. Of his boyhood, and common-school education, there are no details. But soon after arriving at manhood, we find him occupying a tract of land,—a few miles beyond the present limits of Groton,—a part of which may have been included in a grant from the town to his father, Hon. Benjamin Prescott, for valuable services, but a part of which is said to have been purchased of the Indians,—then numerous in that region,—and which his great-grandson still holds by the original Indian title. Here he was more or less instrumental, with the patriot clergyman of the parish, Joseph Emerson, who had served as a chaplain under Sir William Pepperell, in having that part of Groton set off into a separate district, and named Pepperell, in honor of the conqueror of Louisburg.

Meantime, the soldierly spirit which belonged to his nature, and which had been called into exercise by the proximity of the savages, had led him as early as October, 1746,—when the approach of a formidable French fleet had created a consternation in New England,—to enlist in the company of Captain William Lawrence, and march for the defence of Boston. A few years later he takes the office of a lieutenant in the local militia, and, in 1755, proceeds with his regiment to Nova Scotia. Serving there under General Winslow, his gallantry attracted special attention, and he was urged by the General to accept a commission in the regular army. Declining this offer, he returned home to receive the promotion to a captaincy. A happy marriage soon followed, and he remained for nearly twenty years as a farmer and good citizen at his Pep-

perell home;— as Addison said of some one of the heroes of his “Campaign,”—

“ In hours of peace content to be unknown,
And only in the field of battle shown.”

But the controversies with the mother country were by no means unobserved by him. The bill for shutting up the port of Boston, with the view of starving the people into submission and compliance, signed by the King on the 31st of March, and which went into operation on the 1st of June, 1774, stirred the feelings and called forth the succors of the whole continent. Letters of sympathy and supplies of provisions poured in upon our Boston Committee of Correspondence, in answer to their appeal, from every quarter. The earliest letter but two, in order of date, was signed WILLIAM PRESCOTT, dated Pepperell, 4th of July, by order of the committee of that always patriotic town,— sending at once forty bushels of grain, promising further assistance with provisions and with men, and invoking them “ to stand firm in the common cause.” The cause of Boston was then the cause of all.

But the untiring research of the historian Bancroft brought to light for the first time, some years ago, a still more important and memorable letter from Prescott, in behalf of his fellow-farmers and towns-people, addressed, in the following August, to the men of Boston, which breathes the full spirit of Lexington and Concord and Bunker Hill conjoined, not without a strong foretaste of the still distant 4th of July. “ Be not dismayed nor disheartened,” it says, “ in this great day of trials. We heartily sympathize with you, and are always ready to do all in our power for your support,

comfort, and relief; knowing that Providence has placed you where you must stand the first shock. We consider that we are all embarked in one bottom, and must sink or swim together. We think if we submit to those regulations, all is gone. Our forefathers passed the vast Atlantic, spent their blood and treasure, that they might enjoy their liberties, both civil and religious, and transmit them to their posterity. Their children have waded through seas of difficulty, to leave us free and happy in the enjoyment of English privileges. Now, if we should give them up, can our children rise up and call us blessed? Is not a glorious death in defence of our liberties better than a short, infamous life, and our memory to be had in detestation to the latest posterity? Let us all be of one heart, and stand fast in the liberties wherewith Christ has made us free; and may he of his infinite mercy grant us deliverance out of all our troubles."

No braver, nobler words than these of PRESCOTT are found in all the records of that momentous period.

And now, the time having fully come for testing these pledges of readiness for the last resort of an oppressed people, and the voices of Joseph Hawley and Patrick Henry having been distinctly heard, responding to each other from Massachusetts to Virginia, "We must fight,"—Prescott is seen in command of a regiment of minute-men. At the first alarm that blood had been shed at Lexington, and that fighting was still going on at Concord, on the 19th of April, he rallies that regiment without an instant's delay, and leads them at once to the scene. Arriving too late to join in the pursuit of Lord Percy and his flying regulars, he proceeds to Cambridge, and there awaits events, till, on the follow-

ing 16th of June, he receives the order from General Ward — the commander-in-chief of the Massachusetts forces, with whom he had been in constant communication and consultation — to conduct the secret expedition which resulted in the battle of Bunker Hill.

All that remains of his career, after that battle was over, may be summarily despatched. He had originally enlisted for eight months, hoping and believing that troops would not be needed for a longer period; but he continued in the service until the close of 1776, when Boston had been freed from the enemy, when Independence had been declared, and when the war had been transferred to other parts of the country. Nor did he leave it then, until he had commanded the garrison on Governor's Island in the harbor of New York, and had attracted the notice and commendation of Washington by the good order in which he brought off his regiment, when the American army was compelled to retire from the city. He was then more than fifty years old, and physical infirmities incapacitated him for the saddle. But in the autumn of 1777 he once more appears, as a Volunteer, at the battle which ended in the surrender of Burgoyne; and Trumbull, the artist, who unconsciously, and to his own often expressed regret, did him such injustice in his fancy sketch of the battle on this hill, has made ample amends in his picture of Burgoyne's Surrender, — now in the rotunda of the Capitol at Washington, — by giving him a place, musket in hand, in the principal group, next to the gallant Morgan of the Virginia Riflemen, whose statue, by a striking coincidence, has just been unveiled at the Cowpens, at the Centen-

nial celebration of that great South Carolina battle of which Morgan was the hero, as Prescott was the hero of this. No two men are more worthy to stand side by side in our National Historic gallery than William Prescott and Daniel Morgan.¹ Honor—joint honor—to the memories of them both in all time to come, from every tongue and every heart throughout our land!

Again Prescott withdraws to his farm at Pepperell, where he constantly exhibits a vigilant interest, and exercises a wholesome influence, in the affairs of the town and of the State, serving his fellow-citizens as a Magistrate and a Selectman, coming down to Boston in three several years as their Representative in the State Legislature, and once more, buckling on his sword, it is said, during Shays' Rebellion in 1787, to defend the courts of justice at Concord. A man of strong mind, determined will, benevolent as he was brave, liberal even beyond his means, of courteous manners, the pride of his neighborhood, delighting to show kindness and hospitality to his old fellow-soldiers, he died at length on the 13th of October, 1795, on the verge of threescore years and ten, and was buried with military honors.

He left a name, I need not say, not only to be honored in its own right, as long as Bunker Hill shall be a watchword of heroism and patriotism in our land, but to be borne, as it has been, with eminent distinction by his only son, the learned and admirable judge and jurist, and by his accomplished and distinguished grandson, beloved by all who knew him, whose "Ferdinand and Isabella," and "Conquest of Mexico and Peru," and "History of Philip II.," were the earliest triumphs in

¹ Note A at the end.

American historical literature, and were achieved under infirmities and trials that would have daunted any heart, which had not inherited a full measure of the bravery we are here to commemorate.

Nor may I wholly omit to recognize the interest added to this occasion, by the presence of a venerable lady,— his only surviving grandchild,— who, apart from those personal gifts and graces to which I should not be pardoned for alluding, brings to the memories of this hour another illustrious name in American history,— the name of Dexter,— associated, in one generation, with high national service in the Senate and in the Cabinet, and, in two generations, with eminent legal learning, ability, and eloquence.

But I must not dwell longer on any personal topics, however attractive, and must hasten to a conclusion of this address.

I have said, fellow-citizens, that we were here, to-day, to fulfil a long-postponed obligation, to pay a long-deferred debt. But let me not be thought for a moment to imply, that there is anything really lost, anything really to be regretted, as we now unveil this noble Statue, and hail it henceforth, for all years to come, as the frontispiece and figure-head of this consecrated ground. The lapse of time may have evinced a want of quick appreciation on the part of others, but it has taken away nothing from the merits or the just renown of Prescott. On the contrary, it has given an additional and most impressive significance to this memorial, far more than a compensation for any delay in its erection.

I would by no means undervalue or disparage the spontaneous tributes which so often, of late, have immediately followed the deaths of distinguished men, here and elsewhere, and which are fast adorning so many of the public squares and parks of our country — at Washington, at New York, and in Boston, as well as in other of our great cities — with the bronze or marble forms of those who have been lost to our civil or military service. Such manifestations are possible in our day and generation, when wealth is so abundant, and when art is so prolific. They would have been all but impossible, for us, a century, or even half a century, ago. They do honor to the men who are the subjects of them. They do honor to the natural and irrepressible emotions which prompt them. Like the decorations of the Soldiers' Graves, or the dedication of the Soldiers' Homes, they challenge and receive the sympathies of all our hearts. They are, however, the manifestations of the moment, and bespeak but the impulses of the hour.

But when it was my privilege, just a quarter of a century ago, to inaugurate, and give the word for unveiling, the first bronze statue which had ever been erected in the open air within the limits of Boston, and when I reflected that nearly seventy years had then elapsed since the death, and more than a hundred and fifty years since the birth, of BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, whom that statue so admirably portrayed; when, more recently, the statue of SAMUEL ADAMS was unveiled at the old North End of our city, nearly eighty years after his death, and almost a hundred and fifty years after his birth; and when, later still, two hun-

dred and ninety-two years after his birth, and two hundred and thirty-one years after his death, the statue of JOHN WINTHROP was seen standing in yonder Scollay Square, with the charter of Massachusetts in his hand, looking out upon the great city, of more than three hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants, which he had founded,—I could not help feeling that an accumulated interest, an enhanced and augmented glory, would gather around those memorials for every year which had been allowed to pass since they were so richly deserved; and that the judgment of posterity had at last confirmed and ratified the award, which history had long ago pronounced, upon the merits of those whom they represented.

And so again, emphatically, here, to-day, in inaugurating this splendid statue of WILLIAM PRESCOTT, eighty-six years after he was laid in his humble grave, a hundred and fifty-five years after his birth, and a hundred and six years after he stood, where we now stand, in command of this momentous battle, we may all well feel that the tribute has not come a day too late for his permanent fame and glory. We may even rejoice that no partial or premature commemoration of him had anticipated the hour, when not only the wealth of our community, and the advancement of American art, should suffice for an adequate and durable presentment of his heroic form, but when the solid judgment of posterity should have sanctioned and confirmed the opinions of our best historians, founded on the most careful comparison of the most distinct contemporary records. We recognize in such results that History is indeed the great corrector, the grand decider, the irreversible

umpire, the magic touchstone, of truth. An august Posthumous Tribunal, like that of the ancient Egyptians, seems to rise before us, open to every appeal, subject to no statute of limitations,—to which the prejudices of the moment, or the passions of the multitude, are but as the light dust of the balance,—and pronouncing its solemn and final decisions, upon the careers and characters of all whom it summons to the bar of its impartial and searching scrutiny.

Nor can there be, my friends, any higher incentive to honest, earnest, patriotic effort, whether in the field or in the forum, than such evidences, and such assurances, that whatever misapprehensions or neglects may occur at the moment, and though offices and honors, portraits and statues, may be withheld or postponed, the record will not be lost, truth will not perish, nor posterity fail to do that justice, which the jealousy, or the ignorance, or, it may be only, the inability, of contemporaries may have left undone.

It is a most interesting part of the story of this day, that when Prescott proceeded to the headquarters of his commander-in-chief, General Ward, at Cambridge, and reported the results of the expedition which he had been ordered to conduct, and had conducted, he added, perhaps rashly, but with characteristic courage and confidence, that if he could only have three fresh regiments, with sufficient equipments and ammunition, he would return and retake the hill. I know not whether he was ever on this spot again, from that hour to the present. But he is here at last! Thanks to the generosity of our public-spirited fellow-citizens, and

thanks, still more, to the consummate skill of a most accomplished American artist,—second to no living sculptor of the world,—who has given his whole heart, as well as the exquisite cunning of his hand, to the work,—he is here at last, “in his habit as he lived!”

And now, before I proceed with any poor words of my own, let the Statue speak for itself, and display the noble form which has too long been concealed from your impatient sight!

[*The statue was here unveiled.*]

The genius of STORY presents him to us now, in the light *banyan* coat and broad-brimmed hat, which he is known to have thrown on, during the intense heat of the day and of the battle, in exchange for the more stately and cumbersome uniform in which he had marched from Cambridge the night before, and which may be seen dropped beneath his feet. His eagle gaze is riveted with intense energy on the close-approaching foe. With his left hand, he is hushing and holding back the impetuous soldiers under his command, to await his word. With his right hand, he is just ready to lift the sword which is to be their signal for action. The marked and well-remembered features, which he transmitted to his son and grandson, and which may be recognized on at least one of his living descendants, have enabled the artist to supply, amply and admirably, the want of any original portrait of himself. Nothing more powerful and living has been seen on this hill since he was here before. And that very sword,—which so long adorned the library walls of his grandson,—the Historian,—and which is now one of the

treasures of the Massachusetts Historical Society, — one of those “Crossed Swords” whose romantic story has so often been told in verse and in prose,¹ — that same sword, which, tradition tells us, he waved where he now stands, when, seeing at length “the buttons on the coats,” or, it may have been, “the whites of the eyes,” of the advancing enemy in their original onslaught, he first gave the word “Fire!” — that same sword I am privileged to hold up at this moment to your view; — if, indeed, I shall be able to hold it, while it seems ready to leap from its scabbard, and to fly from my hand, to salute and welcome its brave old master and wearer! No blade which ever came from the forges of Damascus, Toledo, or Genoa, was ever witness to greater personal perils, or was ever wielded by a bolder arm.

PREScott stands alone here now. But our little Mu-seum — to be reconstructed, I trust, at no distant day, of enduring materials and adequate dimensions — already contains a marble statue of the glorious WARREN. The great first martyr of the Revolution, and the heroic commander of this earliest revolutionary battle, are now both in place. Around them, on other parts of the hill, in other years, some of the gallant leaders who rushed to their aid from other States, or from other parts of our own State, will, it is hoped, be seen, — Pomeroy, and Stark, and Reed, and Knowlton, with Putnam at the head of them all. They will all be welcome, whenever they may come. Primarily a Massachusetts battle, it was peculiarly, also, a New England battle; and all New England might well be represented on these Heights.

¹ Note B at the end.

But the pre-eminent honors of this occasion are paid, as they are due,— and long, long overdue,— to our grand Massachusetts, Middlesex, farmer and Patriot.

HE HAS RETURNED;— not with three fresh regiments only, as he proposed, but with the acclamations of every soldier and every citizen within the sound of what is being said, or within any knowledge of what is being done, here, to-day. HE HAS RETAKEN BUNKER HILL; and, with it, the hearts of all who are gathered on it at this hour, or who shall be gathered upon it, generation after generation, in all the untold centuries of the future!

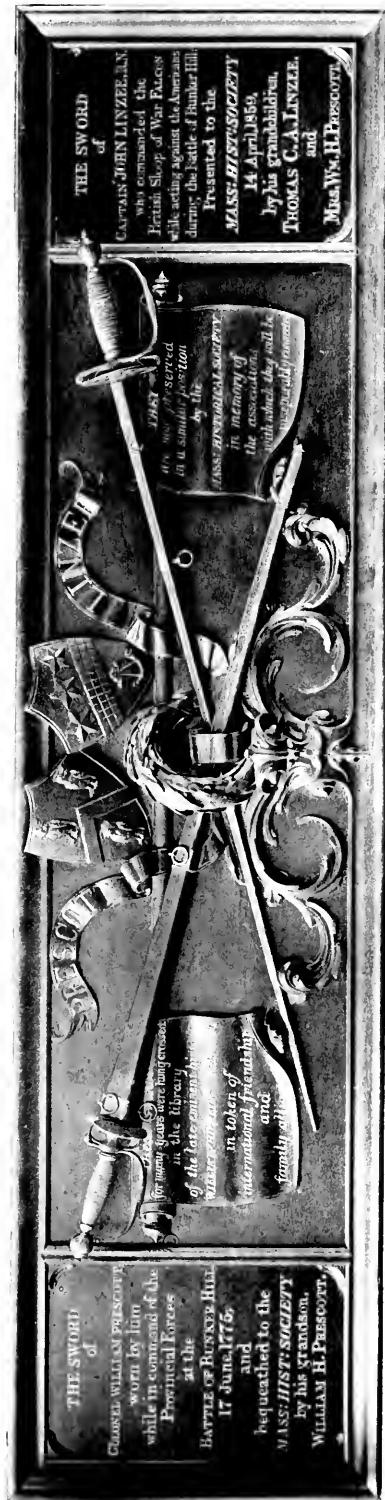
NOTE A (page 24).

DANIEL MORGAN, the hero of the Cowpens, was early in the Continental camp during the siege of Boston. The following most interesting account of his arrival at Cambridge is taken from the speech of Judge Christian, of the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals, at the recent unveiling of Morgan's statue at the Cowpens:—

“As soon as the Revolutionary war broke out, living then at Winchester in the State of Virginia, he raised a company of hardy mountaineers, containing ninety-six men, called the ‘Morgan Rifles.’ Their uniform was a hunting shirt, on the breast of which were stitched in letters by their wives, mothers, and sweethearts the words, ‘Liberty or Death!’ He marched with this company six hundred miles to Boston, where Washington was then in command of the Continental forces. Arriving near Boston late in the evening, his company were resting under the shade, after their long march, when Morgan saw Washington riding out alone. He had been with Washington at Braddock’s defeat, and recognized him at once. He drew up his men into line as Washington approached, and Morgan saluting him, said: ‘General, I come six hundred miles from the right bank of the Potomac and bring to you these gallant men, every one of whom knows how to shoot a rifle, and every one of whom knows how to die for liberty; for you see, sir, that each man bears his banner upon his breast—“Liberty or Death!”’

“History records that the great Washington, leaping upon the ground from his horse, went down the line and shook hands with every man of Morgan’s riflemen, and, the tears streaming down his face, remounted his horse and rode off without saying a word.”

“The Crossed Swords”



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TABLET IN THE LIBRARY OF THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

NOTE B (page 30).

“THE CROSSED SWORDS,” which were hung for many years in the library of the historian Prescott, “in token of international friendship and family alliance,” are now arranged over the doors of the Massachusetts Historical Society’s Library on a tablet, of which a heliotype is here given, with inscriptions which tell their story.

They had previously appeared in literature in THACKERAY’s great Novel “The Virginians,” the introduction to which is as follows:—

“On the library wall of one of the most famous writers of America there hang two crossed swords, which his relatives wore in the great war of Independence. The one sword was gallantly drawn in the service of the king, the other was the weapon of a brave and honored republican soldier. The possessor of the harmless trophy has earned for himself a name alike honored in his ancestor’s country and his own, where genius such as his has always a peaceful welcome. The ensaing history reminds me of yonder swords in the historian’s study at Boston. In the Revolutionary war, the subjects of this story, natives of America, and children of the Old Dominion, found themselves engaged on different sides in the quarrel, coming together peaceably at its conclusion, as brethren should, their love never having materially diminished, however angrily the contest divided them. The colonel in scarlet, and the general in blue and buff, hang side by side in the wainscoted parlor of the Warringtons, in England.”

They were afterwards the subject of some charming lines by Rev. Dr. N. L. Frothingham, read by himself at a meeting of the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1859.

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